

Disputes Review'd :

A

S E R M O N
Preach'd at the
Evening Lecture

A T

SALTERS-HALL,
ON THE
Lord's-Day, July 23. 1710.

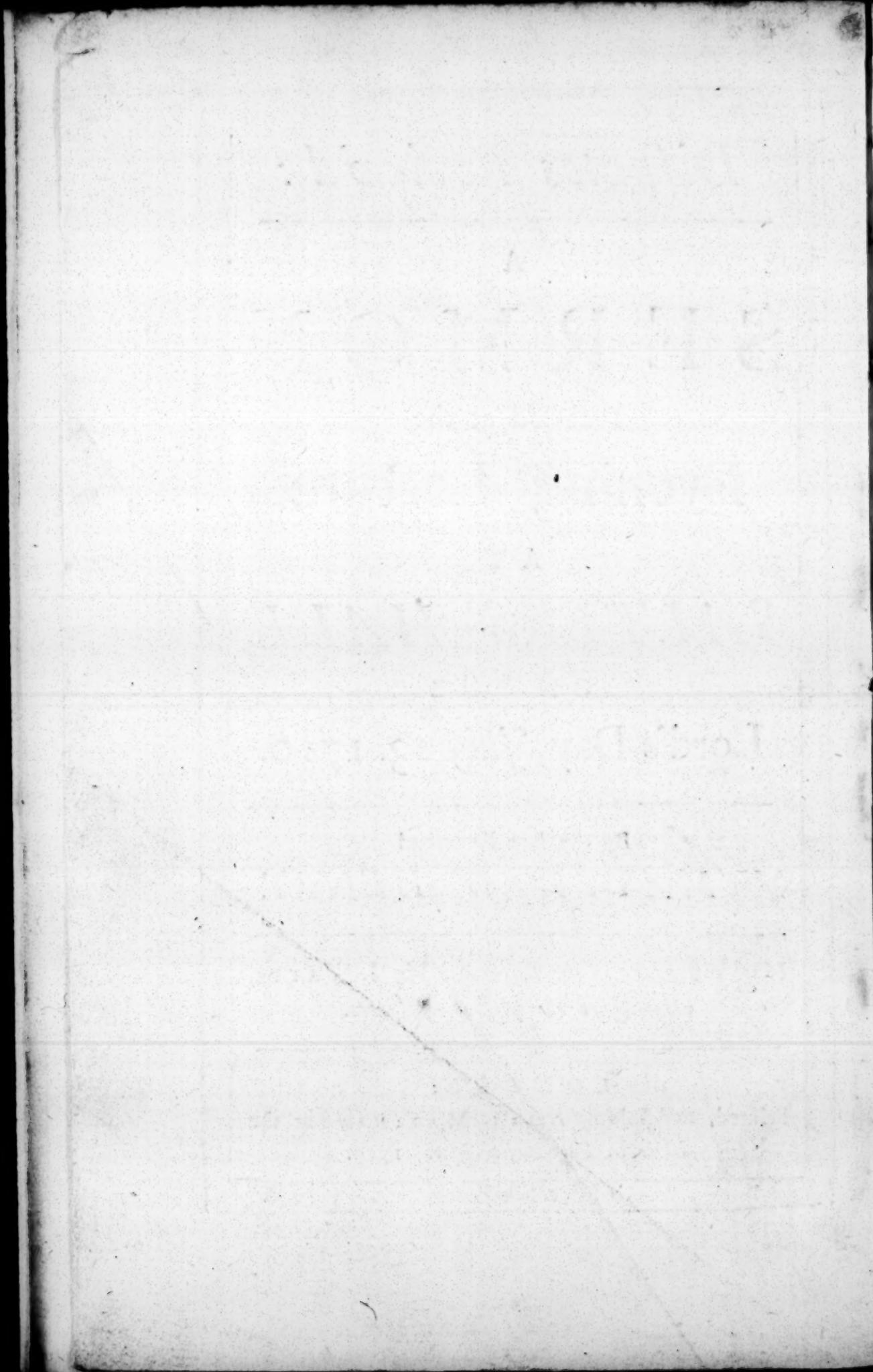
By the late Reverend
Mr. MATTHEW HENRY.

With a Preface by the Reverend Mr. I. WATTS,
relating to the present *Disputes*.

L O N D O N :

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A

P R E F A C E.



URELY the Design to re-publish this useful Sermon of the Late Reverend Mr. *Henry* must meet with a general Approbation. In my Opinion there has not been a Season these Twenty Years so inviting to the Writers of Peace and Union, and so much in want of healing Discourses. That great Man had a most happy Talent in the Practical Way: His easy and familiar Turns of Thought and Language insinuate themselves into the Conscience with so powerful and pleasing a Conviction, that we cannot but delight in hearing our selves so artfully re-

A 2 proved,

proved, even while we blush inwardly, and own the Folly that he corrects.

'T is not for me to recommend the Writings of a Man so greatly honoured of God in his Ministry, so deservedly applauded by the most popular Vote of Men, and so much my Superior in the sacred Work. All that I can do is to wish and pray, that the present Disputes among the Ministers of *London* which have disturbed private Families, founded in publick Assemblys, and had a fatal Spread thro' the Conversation of Christians, may be reviewed in the Light of this Sermon; a Light in which they must appear before *Christ* in that Day of Terror, when he shall require an Account of us, *What is it that ye disputed of by the Way?* I'm persuaded we should then find too much *Carnality* mingled with these *Religious Contentions*, which another great * Man has admirably described and censured in his Sermons on that Subject. This would put each of us upon a severe Enquiry, How much of Zeal for God, and how much of the Wrath of Man are mingled in our Debates on the known Subject of Strife? Surely such an awful Thought as this, would cool the Rage of a Party-Spirit; would suppress a Word of Anger when half formed on the

* *The late Reverend Mr. John Howe.*

Tongue,

Tongue, and stifle the rising Passion in pious Silence. Such a solemn Meditation would quench the Fire that kindles hourly among us; that breaks out perpetually from the Tongue and Pen, to lay waste the peaceful Habitations of Zion. So sore a Disease as this, if not quickly healed, will spread a Blemish and Darkness over the beautiful Face of the Churches, will turn the Profession of Dissenters to a Jest among their Enemies; make wild Havock of the Reputation of Men, and render the sacred Office mean and contemptible. Who will hearken to my Advice, if I have no Government of my own Temper?

I confess, if the Matter of Debate at *London* were the glorious Doctrine of the Trinity, *whether Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God*, there would be a more just Occasion for some Fervour of Spirit: The Scripture seems to me to be sufficiently expressive of this great Truth, and the important Doctrines of our Religion appear to rest firmly on such a Divine Foundation. Yet even then the mere *manner of Subsistence* of Three Persons in one Godhead, ought never to become a warm Controversy, and this Sermon will tell us the Reason, *page 12.* But while the Subject of Contest in this City is reduced to this one Point, (*viz.*) Which is the best way to preserve Truth and Peace? Whether by subscribing the Words of Scripture or humane Forms?

Forms? I think a happy *Medium* might be found out to secure Liberty and the Gospel together, by every one's declaring his own Sence of Scripture in his own Words at all proper Times, Places, and Occasions, and particularly to the Satisfaction of all Persons who have any just Concern therein.

BUT alas! instead of drawing near to some Agreement by such a reconciling Method, the warmer Combatants push each other to wider Extreames; and One must be suspected of *Arianism*, because he thought it needless at that Time, to subscribe a certain Article of the Establish'd Faith; the Other charged with *denying the Perfection of Scripture*, because he thought such a Subscription necessary at that Time.

SHALL I have leave to put the Question here, Are these to be called Consequences or Reproaches? Were these Conclusions framed by Reason or by Wrath? Do those that make such an Inference believe it themselves? Will these Things bear to be rehearsed before the supreme Judge of Reason and Conscience, when our Lord in flaming Fire, shall demand of us, *How did ye manage those Disputes of yours in yonder World that lies all in Ashes?*

LET us stand still and consider that we are Christians as well as Ministers. Let each of us lay

lay his Hand on his own Heart and say, “ Am
“ I a Minister of the Gospel of Peace, and yet
“ dare to practise Contention ? Do I preach
“ Charity to my People, and shall I my self
“ delight in Wrath and Scandal ? Do I teach
“ others to bear Reproaches with Patience, and
“ not to render railing for railing, and shall I
“ retort every Reproach because I have no
“ Patience to bear it ? While I urge all Men
“ to Sincerity and Candor in their dealings,
“ shall I my self deal in fly Insinuations,
“ Slanders, and the invidious Turns of a bi-
“ ting Jest ? And especially if I profess my self
“ to stand on the Charitable side of this Quar-
“ rel, shall I talk like a Fury while I plead for
“ Love ? Shall my Words be fiercer than the
“ Words of my Opponents, while I profess a
“ a larger Charity than they ?” This is like
contending for a generous Freedom of Opini-
on, while I suffer no Man to differ from mine ;
‘Tis as if a Prince should promote the glorious
Doctrine of Liberty of Conscience by Penal-
tys, Chains and Scourges.

I would say to my own Heart, “ If I think
“ Charity so needful to make a Christian, I will
“ not indulge a Thought that shall injure my
“ Brother, or render my own Christianity sus-
“ pected. If I am zealous for Divine Truth
“ and the Mysterys of the Gospel, I will be
“ watchful against every thing that intrenches
“ on Moral Truth and the Veracity of a
“ Christian,

“ Christian, nor will I dare to be the Reporter of a suspected Calumny. How can I pray for the Success of the Ministry, and yet cast such Aspersions on my Fellow-Ministers as may endanger or prevent their Success? Do I plead with God that my Hearers may practise what I have preached, and shall I not go before them with my own Example? Am I not subject to the same Laws of God my Saviour, and must I not be judged by the same Word? Will it not be a terrible Surprise to have my own Discourses and Exhortations to Love and Peace rise up against me at the Last Day, while the Children of my Ministry, who love me beyond measure, shall be forced to joyn with my Sermons and my own Conscience, and all witness against me at that dreadful Tribunal?

O that my Brethren could but hear the Groans of private Christians, when they pour out their Souls before the Lord, and mourn this heavy Judgment! O that they could but see the bleeding Hearts of their own Converts, which their Mutual Quarrels have sorely wounded! I'm persuaded the Fathers would soon relent and drop their Weapons in Peace, if they saw how the Children stand by pale and trembling, and with Horror forebode the cruel Event. O that they knew those secret Wrestlings with God, those flowing Tears, those pathetick Lamentations before the Throne, in which

which their Friends are engaged upon their Knees for their Sakes ! Would they not soon sink all their Indignation and Resentment, and learn to differ without Wrangling ? Or rather, if such a moving Scene were opened before them, would they not at once drop and forget the Debate, and return to mutual Embraces ? I know my Brethren have Souls too tender to hear this unmoved : I know their Hearts would melt under such an endearing Thought, and their Eyes would mingle Tears with their People ; they would fall down and assist them in wrestling with God for Peace, and meditate War no more.

I entreat my Reverend Fathers, and all my Dear Associates in the Work of the Gospel, who shall read these Lines, to forgive the freedom of my Zeal for their Service : Surely they will indulge a Man who loves them at his Soul, tho' his Sorrow and Sollicitude for their Sake may have pusht him on too forward in such an Attempt as this. At least they will give him leave to mourn in Secret the spreading Calamity, and joyn his Prayers to prevent the threatened Desolation.

Of how small Force soever this Preface may be, I cannot but hope that this Sermon once deliver'd at *Salter's Hall* may help to heal the Division that was there made. The Authors of both may plead some Right to become Peacemakers,

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makers, because neither of our Names are enroll'd among the different Party's; the one being dead long e'er this Contention was born, the other like a Man *free among the Dead*, under the Protection of an afflictive Providence: And upon this account we may both claim some Attention to our Proposals of Peace; But the Name of Mr. *Henry* may well Demand it.

SHALL I beseech my Brethren to bestow a retired Hour upon this Discourse, when their Souls look inward upon themselves, and set themselves before the Lord? Shall I engage them to promise that they will not sweep over the Pages with an hasty Eye, meerly to give Judgment on the Performance, but let Conscience sit as Judge upon their own Conduct while they ~~read~~ it, under the Eye of an Heart-searching God. And O may this Word from *the Dead who yet speaketh*, restrain the contentious Speeches of the Living! May this Evening Lecture, arm'd with the Sword of the Spirit, cut off the long Entail of Mischief that sprung from the Disputes of an Afternoon! And by casting in of a Tree that grew on the same Ground, may the bitter Waters of Strife be healed?

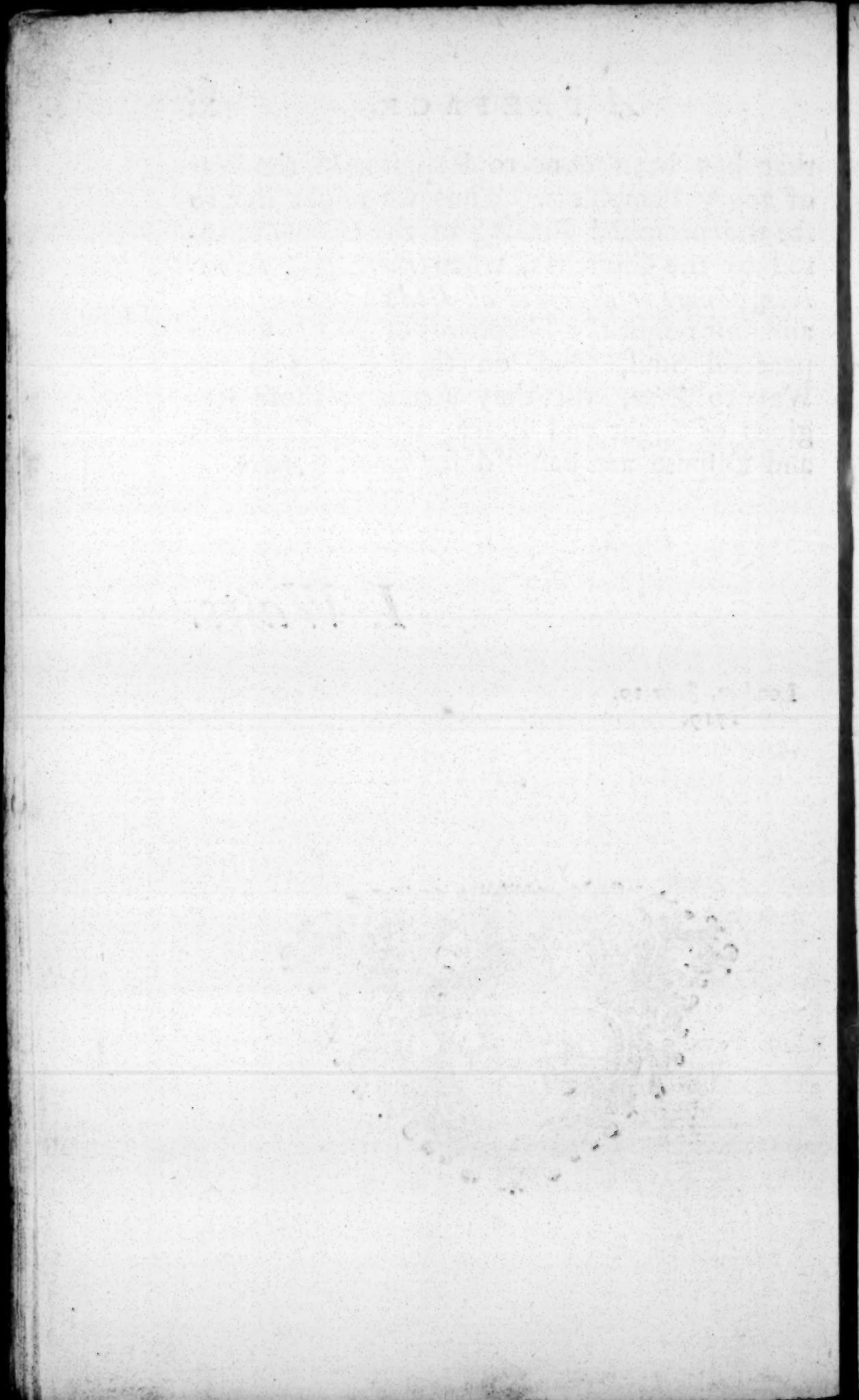
I would call upon my Friends to assist me in this reconciling Work, and to entertain the World with Books enough of the peaceable Kind, to counterballance all the Injury that

that has been done to Religion in the War of angry Pamphlets. Thus we might live to see the promised Blessing of the Gospel restored to the Churches, when *there shall be nothing to hurt or destroy in all God's holy Mountain* : and thus might the Shepherds of *Israel*, with a peaceful Soul, lead on their Flocks in the Way to *Zion*, till they arrive at those Regions of Light and Peace, whence Darkness and Dispute are banish'd for ever. *Amen.*

I. Watts.

London, June 10.
1719.





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Sermon 1.

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MARK IX. 33.

— *What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?*

OUR Lord Jesus is here calling his Disciples to an Account about a warm Debate they happen'd to have among themselves, as they travell'd along, upon a Question often started, but not yet determin'd, *Which of them should be the greatest?* They thought no other but that their Master should shortly enter upon the Possession of a temporal Kingdom, and all the Pomp and Grandeur of it, and that they should be prefer'd with him; But they could not agree who should be prime Minister of State, and have the first Post of Honour. 'Tis a sad Instance of the Remainders of Corruption in the Hearts even of good People; and shews that Pride, Ambition, and Affectation of worldly Honour, are Sins that do most easily beset even Christ's own Disciples, which, therefore, we should all carefully watch and strive against.

Probably our Lord Jesus over-heard some Words that pass'd in this Dispute; for those that are hot upon an Argument are apt to speak louder than

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becomes them ; and when the Temper is not kept within due Bounds, commonly the Voice is not ; But whether he *over-heard* them or no, he *knew very well* what they had been talking of, and every Word that had been *said*, and (which was more than any Man could know) from what Principle it was *said*, and what more they would have *said* ; for as there is not a *Word in our Tongue*, so there is not a *Thought in our Heart*, tho' newly *risen* and *started* there, tho' industriously *suppress'd* and *stifl'd* there, but he *knows it altogether*. He is that Essential Eternal *Word* of

Psal. 139. 4.

Heb. 4. 12,13. *God, who is a Discerner of the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart,* and before whom *all things are naked and open.* Let *all the Churches take Notice of this,* that our Lord Jesus not only *knows our Work,* but is *he which searcheth the Reins and Hearts.*

And yet tho' Christ *knew* what his Disciples had been talking of, he *ask'd them* what it was, because he would *know it from them*, and would have them to *confess* their Fault and Folly in it ; that from thence he might take occasion to *rectify* their Mistakes, and to *instruct* and *reason* them into a better Temper.

Think not that my Design from this Text is to *arraign, examine, or enquire into* any Disputes or Contests that may be among you, of any Kind ; for as (blessed be God) I know of no *particular* Occasion for it, nor have any thing else in my Eye, in the Choice of this Subject, but what is *common to all*, so if there were, I should think my self the unfittest Man in the World to be a *Judge or a Divider.* And besides if I should thus go about to take my Master's Work out of his Hands, I should contradict that which is my Design in putting this Question to you, *What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way ?* and that is to shew you that our Lord Jesus doth and will *enquire* into these Matters, and to bind you over to his *Judgments.*

Four

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Four Things this Text teacheth us, who are all in Profession Disciples of Christ, as we are baptized Christians.

I. That we must all expect to be called to an Account by our Lord Jesus.

II. That we must in a particular Manner be call'd to an Account about our Discourses among ourselves.

III. That among our Discourses we shall especially be call'd to an Account about our Disputes.

IV. That of all our Disputes we shall be most strictly reckon'd with for our Disputes about Precedency and Superiority.

For the First, We must all expect to be call'd to an Account shortly, by our Lord Jesus, concerning the Temper of our Minds, and the Course and Tenor of our Lives, now we are *in the Way*.

1. We are all now *in the Way*, following Christ, as his Disciples here, in *Consort*; we are *Viatores*, Travellers, under the Conduct of our Great Master, towards the *better Country*; And here we are upon our Trial; 'Tis the State of our Probation; and according as our *Steps* are, while we are in the Way, our *Rest* will be when we are at our Journey's End. It concerns us therefore, what we have to do, to do it *while we are yet in the Way*, and whatever we do *while we are in the Way*, to do it with an Eye to our End.

2. There will be a *Review* of what passeth *in the Way*; 'twill all be call'd over again, *every Work* Eccl. 12. 14. and *every Word* will be brought into Judgment, will be weighed in a just and unerring Balance, will be produc'd in Evidence for us or against us. There will not need any *Repetition*, every thing is now *recorded* in the Book of God's Omniscience, and it is enough that in that Day the *Books* will Rev. 20. 12. be open'd, and all will be judg'd out of those things which were found written in the Books, according to their *Works*. It concerns us therefore whatever we

we do in the Way, to do it as those that *must give Account*, and to consider how it will pass in the Account; how it will look in the Review; that we may dread doing that which will make against us then, and may abound in that which will be *Fruit abounding to our Account*, and which we shall meet again with Comfort, on t'other Side Death and the Grave.

Phil. 4. 17.

Isa. 33. 22.
John 5. 22.

Acts 17. 31.

2 Cor. 5. 9, 10.

3. The *Account* in the great Day must be given up to our *Lord Jesus*, for we call him *Master and Lord*, as these Disciples did, and to him therefore we are accountable, as *Scholars and Servants*, how we spend our Time. He is our *Judge*, for he is our *Law-giver*, and to him the *Father has committed all Judgment*, particularly that in which he will judge the *World in Righteousness* by that *Man whom he has ordain'd*. Christ shall have the *Honour of it*, and let all good Christians take the *Comfort of it*, that he who is an Advocate for all Believers will be their *Judge*; But withal let it oblige us to the utmost Care and Circumspection in our Walking: We must therefore *labour to be accepted of the Lord*, and approve ourselves to him in our *Integrity*, because we shall all appear before the *Judgment Seat of Christ*, to give *Account* of every thing done in the *Body*. God made the *World* by his Son, and by him as the fittest Person he will judge the *World*.

Now this is a good Reason,

1. *Why we should judge ourselves*, and prove our own *Work*, and see that our *Matters be right and good* against that Day. Let us examine our selves concerning our *Spiritual State*, that we may make sure *Work* for our own *Souls*, and often call ourselves to an *Account* concerning the *Way* we are in, and the *Steps we take in that Way*, that we may renew our *Repentance*, for whatever we find to have been amiss, and make our 1 Cor. 11. 28, *Peace with God in Christ*. And if we would thus 31. judge our selves, we should not be judged of the Lord.

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Lord. When we come to our Journey's End, it will be ask'd, How we carried our selves *in the Way*? Let us therefore carry our selves accordingly, and *Ponder the Path of our Feet*.

2. 'Tis a good Reason *why we should not judge one another*, or be severe in our Censures one of another: we thereby *invade Christ's Throne*, for it is his Prerogative to *call his Disciples to an Account*; and tho' he design'd them to be one another's *Helpers*, he never intended they should be one another's *Judges*. *We must all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ*, and therefore must not judge one another. We must be judged our selves, and may expect to be judg'd with Severity, if we be severe in judging our Brethren, for the *Measure we mete will be measur'd to us*. Our Brethren likewise must be judged by the Lord Jesus, and therefore if we pretend to judge them, they are *coram non judice*. Who are we that we should judge another Man's Servant? to his own Master he stands or falls, and to his Judgment 'tis fit we should leave him.

For the Second. Among other things that pass in the Way, we must expect to be call'd to Account for *what we have talk'd among ourselves*. We are apt to make a light Matter of this, and when we have talk'd at Random, what comes uppermost, without Regard to God or Man, we think to turn it off with an Excuse that it was but *Talk*, and *Words are but Wind*; But we wretchedly mistake and put a *Cheat* upon ourselves, if that be true which our Saviour has told us, and undoubtedly true it is, that not only for every profane and wicked Word, for every false and spiteful Word, but for every idle Word that Men speak, they must give Account in the Day of Judgment; Nay, and so shall their Doom be, for by thy Words thou shalt be justified, and by thy Words thou shalt be condemn'd. Christ takes Notice of what we say now, and we should think we hear him say

Luke 24. 17.

say to us when we are in Conversation, as he did to the two Disciples going to *Emmaus*, *What manner of Communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk and are sad, or as ye sit and are merry?* Are they such as becomes Christians? Are you not saying that which must be *unheard* again by Repentance, or you'll be *undone*? And as Christ takes notice of it now, so he will call it over again in the Day of Account.

What we talk *among our selves* with the usual Freedom of Conversation, we do not expect to hear of again; it is *inter nos*, and therefore we think we may allow our selves a Liberty. What is said under the Seal of Conversation, we think almost as safe in point of Honour, as what is said *under the Seal of Confession*: None but a *Tale-bearer*, that great Mischief-maker, will *reveal such Secrets*: But tho' it be talk'd *among our selves*, it cannot escape either the Cognizance or the Judgment of our Lord Jesus.

Prov. 11. 13.

Eph. 4. 29.

Mat. 10. 32.

Mal. 3. 16.

1. If we talk *any thing that is good*, among our selves, and that is *to the use of edifying*, which manifests Grace in the Speaker, and ministers *Grace* to the Hearers, Christ takes notice of *that*, and we shall *hear of it again to our comfort*, in that Day, when those who thus *confess Christ before Men* shall be own'd by him before his *Father*, and the Holy Angels. When they that *feared the Lord spake often one to another*, for their mutual Encouragement to hold fast their Integrity in a time of general Apostasy, *the Lord hearkned and heard it*, as one greatly well pleas'd with it, and *a Book of Remembrance was written before him*, in which were enter'd all those pious Conferences of them that *feared the Lord, and thought upon his Name*; and the Day will come when *this Book, among the rest, shall be open'd*.

There is not a good Word coming from a good Heart, and directed to a good end, but it is *heard in Secret, and shall be rewarded openly*, tho' perhaps there

there are those now who ridicule and banter such Language: What is spoken for the Edification of *others* will turn to a good account to *our selves*; and it will add to our Joy in Heaven to have been any way instrumental to help others thither. Nay, if it should not reach *their Hearts* for whom it is design'd, yet the Comfort of it will return into *our own Bosoms*; and what was well intended for the Honour of Christ, shall not be *overlook'd* in the Day of Account.

This should engage and encourage us to keep up religious Discourse, that it will be remember'd to our Advantage in the Account shortly, tho' we may forget it; as *the Righteous* could not say that ever *they saw Christ hungry and fed him, or thirsty and gave him Drink*, yet Christ will not forget it, but will *place it to account*, as an acceptable Service done to him. Mat. 25. 37.

2. If we talk *any thing that's ill* among our selves, if *any corrupt Communication* proceeds out of *our Mouths*, dictated by the *Corruption* of our own Minds, and which has a tendency to *corrupt* the Minds and Manners of others, Christ observes that too, is displeased with it, and we shall *hear of it again*, either by the Checks of our own Consciences, in order to our Repentance, or in the Day of the Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God, when according even to *Enoch's Prophecy*, *the Lord shall come* to reckon with Jude 15. *Sinners*, not only for all their ungodly Deeds, but *for all their hard Speeches, spoken against him*. It will be ask'd sooner or later, *What was it that you talk'd* such a time, proudly, vainly, filthily, that foolish Talking and Jesting which is not becoming? *What was it that you talk'd* in such and such Company by way of Reproach to your Neighbour, when you *sate* deliberately, *sate* Psal. 50. 20. *magisterially*, and *spoke against your Brother*, and *slander'd* those, whose good Names you ought to have protected? Or, which aggravates it, by B way

Exod. 22. 28. way of Reflection on your Superiors, reviling the Gods, and speaking evil of the Rulers of your People,
 Eccl. 10. 20. little thinking that a Bird of the Air may carry the Voice ? Let this Consideration oblige us all to
 Psal. 39. 1. take heed to our Ways, that we offend not with our Tongue, and to keep our Mouth as it were with a Bridle, that we may say nothing but what we can bear to be told of again. And we have need to beg of God, that by his Grace he would set a Watch before the Door of our Lips, a double Watch upon the Door of our Hearts, out of the abundance of which the Mouth speaks, that nothing may proceed from them to his Dishonour.

For the Third, As other our Discourses among our selves by the Way, so especially our Disputes will all be call'd over again, and we shall be call'd to an account about them. What was it that ye disputed among your selves ? What was the Subject of the Dispute ? and how was it manag'd ? Disputing supposeth some Variance and Strife, and a mutual Contradiction and Opposition arising from it. Disputing by the Way is falling out by the Way, a thing directly contrary to the Charge which Joseph as a Type of Christ gave to his Brethren, See that ye fall not out by the Way ; and therefore we may expect to be reprov'd for it.

There are Disputes that are of use among the Disciples of Christ, and which in the Review we may reflect upon with Comfort. Did we dispute for the Conviction of Atheists and Deists, and other the Enemies of our Holy Religion, or for the Confirmation of those that were in danger of being drawn away by their Delusions ? Did we contend earnestly for the Faith once deliver'd to the Saints, and with Meekness and Fear both instruct 2 Tim. 2. 25, others that oppos'd themselves, and give a Reason of 1 Pet. 3. 15. our own Hope that is in us ? Did we fairly and calmly discourse lesser Matters in difference between us and our Brethren, that we might find out the Truth, and have our Mistakes rectified ; or if we

Jude 3.

2 Tim. 2. 25.

1 Pet. 3. 15.

we cannot hereby come to be of the same Mind, yet we may see that even those we *differ from* have so much Colour of Reason on their side, as that they may still differ from us, and yet not forfeit their Reputation either for Wisdom or Honesty? Did we with *Prudence* and *Mildness* debate our *Cause* with our *Neighbour* himself, and not Prov. 25. 8, go forth hasty to strive, and tell him his *Fault* before us and him alone, before we tell it to the World or the *Church*, in order to a friendly Accommodation; these are Disputes which will pass well in the Account, when they come to be call'd over again.

But our Disputes are too often such, as that when we come to be ask'd about them, as the Disciples were here, we shall like them hold our *Peace*, as being ashamed to have them spoken of again, and having nothing to say in our own *Vindication*; And (as the Town-clerk of *Ephesus* urg'd) when we are call'd in question for the Up-roar, can shew no justifiable *Cause*, whereby we may give an account of it.

Three things may occasion Disputes among Christians, among Ministers, Neighbours, Friends, Relations, which perhaps when they come to be reflected upon as here, will be found to have a great deal in them that was *culpable*, different Opinions, separate Interests, and clashing Humours.

1. Disputes commonly arise from *Differences of Opinion*, either in Religion and Divine things, (about which oftentimes the Disputes and Contests are most violent) or in Philosophy, Politicks, or other Parts of Learning, or in the Conduct of Human Life. While Men *differ* so much in Capacity, Temper, Genius and Education, and different Sentiments are receiv'd by Tradition from our Fathers, it cannot be expected that Men should all agree in the same *Notions*. The same thing seen with *different Eyes*, and by *different Lights*,

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Lights, may appear to one *true* and *very good*, and to another *false* and *very bad*, tho' both imploy their Faculties about it with equal Diligence and Sincerity. This cannot but give rise to Disputes, for we are naturally forward (and sometimes over-forward) to *clear our selves*, and *convince others*, and have such a Conceit of our own Judgment, as to think that every body ought to be of *our Mind*, and that if they will be rul'd by Reason, they *will be so*; for *vain Man would be wise*, would be thought to be so, tho' he be *born as the wild Asses Colt*.

But these Disputes are often such as we may justly be *asham'd of*, when we come to look back upon them.

(1.) Upon account of the Matter of them. *What was it that we disputed among our selves?* *What was it we were so hot and eager about?*

Perhaps it was something *above us*, about the Nature and Attributes, the Counsels and Decrees of God, and the Operations of his Providence and Grace, and the Person of the Mediator, those *se-cret things which belong not to us*; things which we

Deut. 29. 29. did not understand, nor could; things which it was Presumption for us to dispute about, for the Angels with an awful Reverence humbly *desire to look into them*, as not pretending to be Masters of them: And the Great Apostle, who had been in the third Heavens, not only own'd that the Words he heard there were *unspeakable*, but was so much at a loss to express himself concerning the Work of Redemption, tho' it is in some measure *revel'd*, that despairing to find the Bottom, he sits down at the Brink, and adores the Depth

Rom. 11. 33. of that Mystery: *O the Depth of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God!* *O what reason have we with Job to abhor our selves, and to repent in Dust and Ashes*, because, like him, in our Disputes with our Friends, concerning the Reasons and Methods of God's Proceedings, we have *darkned*

Job 42. 3, 5.

Conn.

Counsel by Words without Knowledge, and have uttered that which we understood not, things too wonderful for us.

Perhaps it was something *below us*, not worth disputing about, especially with so much Warmth and Violence: 'Twas a Trifle, a meer *Strife of Words*, a Dispute *de lana caprina*, as if the Matter were started only for want of something to wrangle about; so *inconsiderable* a thing, that which way soever it goes, the Costs are much more than the Damage: In the Reflection we may justly blush to think that we should make so much ado, so great a Noise *about nothing*.

Perhaps it was something *foreign* to us, that we were no way concern'd in; some Matter of Politicks it may be, which belongs not to those of our Rank and Station, but must be left to wiser Heads, whose Business it is to deal in things of that nature. Our Lord Jesus after his Resurrection twice check'd his Disciples for a *vain Curiosity*, once in enquiring concerning one another's Affairs, when Peter ask'd concerning John, *What shall this Man do?* John 21. 22. Christ answer'd him, *What's that to thee? Follow thou me.* And another time in enquiring concerning God's Counsels, *It is not for you to know the Times or the Seasons.* Acts 1. 7.

Perhaps it was something *indifferent*, like the Controversy among the Primitive Christians concerning the *observing of Days*, and making a *Distinction of Meats*, Rom. 14. 2, &c. which the Apostle himself doth not think fit to determine, but leaves each side to practise according as their Judgment was, without imposing upon either, since they might be of either Mind, and yet be *accepted of God*, only forbids them to fall out about it, or to *despise*, or *judge one another*.

(2.) Upon account of our Management of them. When our *Disputes among our selves by the Way* come to be review'd, it will be found that the Mischief was done not by the things themselves, con-

concerning which we differ'd, but by our Mismanagement of the Controversy.

Our Master will be displeas'd with us if it be found that we have been hot and fierce in our Disputes, and have mingled our Passions and peevish Resentments with them ; If a *Point of Honour* hath govern'd us more than a *Point of Conscience*, and we have contended more for Victory and Reputation than for Truth and Duty ; If we have contended about things of small moment for or against them, and have neglected the weightier Matters of the Law and Gospel ; If we have spent more of our Zeal on Matters in Difference than they deserve, and have lost the Vitals of Religion in our Heat about Circumstantial, and have disputed away our Seriousness and Devotion, *what then shall we do when God riseth up ? and when he visiteth, what shall we answer him ?*

Job 31. 14.

Rom. 14. 1.

James 3. 1.

If in our Disputes for the Truth we lie against the Truth, and *speak deceitfully for God*, the good Intention will be so far from justifying the Lie, that the Lie will condemn the good Intention, and convict it of Hypocrisie ; for if the Intention were *really good*, such a Practice would be *abhor'd*. If we have the *Itch of Disputing*, and a Spirit of Contradiction, that is certainly one of those foolish hurtful Lusts, *from whence come Wars and Fightings*. If we receive our Brethren that are weak to *doubtful Disputations*, and love to perplex and puzzle them, and run them aground with Objections against what they and we believe, it shews a great Contempt both of the Truth, and of their Souls, and is a jesting with both. If we judge and censure and condemn our Brethren that are not in every thing of our Mind, and tho' we call our selves *Disciples*, set up for *Masters*, *many Masters*, if we give reproachful Language, and call *foul Names*, which commonly betrays the Weakness of the Cause, and is *ingloriously* press'd into the Service

to

to make up the Deficiency of Argument, we shall have a great deal to answer for, when all our Disputes will be call'd over again by our Master.

2. Many Disputes arise from *separate and interfering Interests in this World*. Neighbours and Relations quarrel about their Rights and Properties, their Estates and Trades, their Honours and Powers and Pleasures ; *Meum* and *Tuum* are the Great Subject of Dispute, and engage People in endless Strifes. The first Dispute we read of in the Primitive Church was about a Money-Matter : The Grecians quarrell'd with the Hebrews *because they thought their Widows were neglected in the daily Ministrations*. *Acts 6. 1.* Many Disputes of this Kind happen, which will be inquir'd into as well as those about Differences in Opinion, and therefore it concerns us to reflect upon them, that whatever we find to have been amiss in them may be repented of, we may in *godly sorrow* quarrel with *our selves*, and *justly*, for our *unjust* unbecoming Quarrels with *our Brethren*.

Ask then, what was it that you disputed about with such a Neighbour, such a Friend, at such a time ; perhaps you *disputed* that which you ought to have yielded without Dispute, a just Debt, or a rightful Possession, which you thought to have carry'd, by Dint of Opposition, against Equity. Perhaps you disputed about something very trivial, and of small Value, which was not worth controverting, but which, if the right were indeed of your Side, you might have receded from it for Peace-sake, without any Detriment to your selves or Families. Perhaps the Dispute might have been *prevented*, or when it was began, might *quickly and easily* have been *accommodated* with a little Wisdom and Love ; as the Strife between *Abraham* and *Lot* was soon *Gen. 13. 8, 9.* ended, and the Matter compromis'd by *Abraham's* prudent Condescension. A little *yielding* would

would pacify great Offences, and put an effectual Stop to that threatening Mischief which sometimes a little Fire kindles.

Review your *Law-Suits*, and it may be you will find, that how *stiff* soever you were in the Heat of the Prosecution of them, your cooler Thoughts tell you they were not manag'd *as becomes Christians*; you did not try to end things as you ought to have done in an *amicable Way*; Perhaps they were begun *rashly*, and in Passion, and then no wonder if they be carried on *unfairly*, and that which was a hasty sudden Passion in the Beginning of the Quarrel, is in Danger of ripening into a *rooted Malice* before the End of it; And they who at first pretended that they design'd only to *right themselves*, at length, as their Resentments have grown more and more keen, are not ashamed to own that they are resolv'd to *revenge themselves*.

These Disputes, as they are most *common*, so they are most *scandalous* among Relations, and those who are under particular Obligations to love one another; and whatever it is that keeps Brethren from dwelling together in Unity, is very provoking to Christ, who hath made Brotherly Love the Livery of his Family; And it is ver-

Prov. 18. 19. ry hardly removed; for a Brother offended is harder to be won than a strong City, and their Contentions are as the Door of a Castle; witness Jacob and Esau.

3. Some Disputes, and hot ones too, arise merely from *Passion* and *clashing Humours*, where really there is nothing of Judgment or Interest in the Case. Some indulge themselves in a Crossness of Temper that makes them continually uneasy to their Relations, the nearest, the dearest, and to all about them. They love to thwart and disagree, and to dispute every thing, tho' never so plain, or never so trifling. Many make their Lives, and the Relations wherein they stand

stand uncomfortable by this, especially when both Sides are of such a Spirit ; One will have their *Humour*, their *Saying*, and the other will have their's, and so they are ever and anon *disputing* which shall be *greatest*, and instead of aiming to *please*, are contriving to *displease* and *contradict* one another.

But do such consider that they must give an *Account* to Christ for all these *Disputes among themselves by the Way*, that they will all be call'd over again ? How ill doth it become the *Disciples* and Followers of the *humble Jesus* to carry Things with a high Hand, imperiously and with Rigour towards their inferiour Relations, not suffering them to speak for themselves, nor willing to hear reason from them ! How ill doth it become the *Worshippers* of the *God of Love* to be *envious* and *spiteful* and *ill-natur'd*, and *quarrel-some* with all they have any Dealings with ! The Father of the *Prodigal*, when his Elder Son was *out of Humour, angry, and would not come in*, did not *dispute* with him, *chide* him and *threaten* him, Luke 15. 28.] tho' he very well *deserv'd* it, but he *went out and i. treated* him, spoke him fair, and so brought him into good Temper again, which is written for our Learning, that we may go and *do like-wise*, but withal for our Shame that we have *not done so*. By the *Account* which the *Scripture* gives of some peevish passionate *Disputes*, it appears that *Notice* is taken of the Height to which the *Ferment* of the *Spirit* riseth at such a Time ; When the Men of *Ephraim* quarrell'd with *Gideon* Judg. 8. 1. upon a Point of Honour, it is left upon Record, that they did *chide with him sharply*, tho' by his exemplary Mildness, as well as by his eminent Services, he *deserv'd* better at their Hands — When, in a like Case, *Judah* and *Israel* fell out, it is observ'd that the *Words* of the *Men of Judah* 2 Sam. 19. 43. *were fiercer than the Words of the Men of Israel*. And if it be so indeed, that an *Account* is kept

of the Sharpness of our Chiding, and the Fierceness of our Words, we are concern'd by true Repentance to judge our selves for it, that we *may not be judged of the Lord.*

And whatever we find has been amiss in our Disputes of any kind, let it be amended for the future.

1. As far as we are able to make a Judgment, let us see to it that we have *Truth and Right on our Side, in all our Disputes*, and not be *confident* any further than we see *just Cause* to be so. We must not only never contend for that which we know to be *false and wrong*, but not for that which is *doubtful*, or which we do not know to be *true and right*. Let us never wrong our Consciences in any of our Contests, nor say we believe that to be *true*, and therefore *dispute for it*, which really we *do not believe* to be so, nor demand that as *our own*, which we know or have Reason to suspect we have no *good Title* to, nor deny that to another which we cannot but think is *justly his*.

And if in the Progress of any Dispute or Controversie, it be made to appear to us, at length, that we were *mistaken*, and in the Wrong, we must be ready to *acknowledge* it, thankful to those that have *discover'd* it to us, and not ashamed to *let fall* the Controversy: And we have a *false Notion of Honour*, if we think this will be any *real Disparagement* to us, for certainly St. Paul shewed more *true Courage*, and merited more

2 Cor. 13. 8. *true Praise*, when he said, *I can do nothing against the Truth*, than *Goliab* did when he *defy'd* all the *Armies of Israel*.

2. In *Matters of doubtful Disputation*, while we are contending for that which we take to be right, let us at the same Time *think it possible that we may be in the wrong*. When we contend for the great Principles of Religion, in which all good Christians are agreed, we need not fear our being

being in a Mistake, they are of undoubted Certainty, *we know and are sure that Jesus is the Christ.* But there are many things that are not so clearly reveal'd, because not of so much Moment, in which the Truth indeed lies but on one Side, and yet wise and good Men are not agreed on which side it lies ; Here, tho' we both *argue*, and *act* according to the Light that God has given us, yet we must not be over-confident of our own Judgment, as if *Wisdom must die with us* ; others *Job 12. 2, 3.* *have Understanding as well as we,* and are not inferior to us ; nay, perhaps they every way excel us, and therefore who can tell but they may be in the right ? However they *argue* and act according to the Light they have, which we ought to pay a Deference to, so as not to condemn all those for weak Men, or ill Men, that are not in every thing of our Mind, and will not say as we say — *Job in dispute is not unwilling to put the Case,* *Be it indeed that I have erred.* *Job 19. 4.*

In Matters of Fact on which Right depends, it is possible we may be mistaken ; *Humanum est errare.* Words may be misunderstood and misapprehended, and the wisest and most cautious and observing may be guilty of *an Over-sight*, and may forget something that would very much alter the Case, and therefore it will be no Credit to our Wisdom and Goodness to be too *positive*, too *peremptory*, as long as there is a Possibility of our being deceived. Never let our Assertions go beyond our Assurances, nor let us give that as *certain* and *great*, which was given us as *doubtful* and *little*, but be very wary in what we maintain, not only for our Reputation's Sake, lest our Neighbour *search us and put us to Shame*, but for Conscience-sake, towards God, who hates a *proud Look*, and a *lying Tongue*, two very ill *Prov. 6. 17.* Things that commonly go together, to support one another.

3. Let us keep the full Possession and Government of our own Spirits in all our Disputes. Let us carefully suppress all inward Tumults, whatever Provocation may be given us, and let our Minds be calm and sedate, whatever Argument we are engag'd in. Let no Contradiction put us into a Heat or Disorder; for when *Passion* is up we are not so capable as we ought to be either to hear Reason or to speak it, nor is it likely we should either convince or be convinc'd of Truth and Right: Meekness and Quietness of Spirit do as much befriend a Cause as they are the Beauty and Ornament of its Advocates.

If we contend for that which is wrong, the more *passionate* we are, the greater is the Sin of the Contention, and the more there is of the Image of the Devil upon it, who is not only the *Father of Lies* and *Falshood*, but a *Red Dragon* and a *roaring Lion*. But if we have *Truth* and *Right* on our Side, that needs no *intemperate* Heats and Passions for the Support of it, nor can have any real Service done it by them. The *Cause of Heaven* can never be pleaded with any Credit or Success by a *Tongue set on Fire of Hell*. The

James 1. 20. *Wrath of Man* works not the Righteousness of God.

Parties may be serv'd by Fury and Violence, but the Common Interests of Pure Christianity will certainly be *prejudic'd* by it. Christ was therefore fit to teach us, and we are invited to come and learn of him; it is not said because in him were *hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*, tho' that is certainly true, but because he is *meek and lowly in Heart*, and can have *Compassion* on the *Ignorant*,

Mat. 11. 29. and herein all that undertake to instruct others, must study to imitate him. And this is the likeliest Way to gain our Point, if indeed we be in the right, for the *Words of the Wise* are *heard in quiet, more than the Cry of him that rules among Fools*.

Eccl. 9. 18.

4. Let

4. Let us never lose the Charity we ought to have for our Brethren in our Disputes of any kind, nor violate the sacred Laws of it. Our Lord Jesus foresaw and foretold that the Preaching of his Gospel would occasion much *Division*, that it Luke 12. 51. would set *Men* at variance, and be the Subject of much *Dispute*: And therefore he thought it very requisite to bind the Command of *mutual Love* so much the more strongly upon his Followers, because there was danger lest that should be lost in these Disputes: He makes it one of the fundamental Laws of his Kingdom, the new *Commandment*, that we *love one another*; and the Livery of his Family, by which *all Men* might know who are his Disciples. See how these *Christians* love one another.

Let us therefore in all our Disputes keep ourselves under the commanding Power and Influence of *Holy Love*; for that Victory is dearly purchas'd, that is got at the Expence of *Christian Charity*. Let us honour *all Men*, and not trample upon any, nor set those among the *Dogs of our Flock*, whom for ought we know Christ hath set with the *Lambs of his*. Let us never bring a railing *Accusation* against any. *Michael the Archangel*, tho' he was sure in the *Dispute* he had Right on his side, and the *Glory of God* was nearly concern'd, and it was with the *Devil* that he contended, yet he would not thus attack his *Adversary*. The *Scourge of the Tongue* hath driven more out of the *Temple*, than ever it drove into it. Let us always put the best Construction on Mens Words and Actions that they will bear, not digging up *Mischief*, as *evil Men* do, nor rejoicing in *Iniquity*, but rejoicing in the *Truth*, hoping the best as far as we can. Let us not aggravate Matters in variance, nor by strain'd *Inuendo's* and *Misrepresentations* make either side worse than it is; for that's a Method which may *harden* one side, but can never *convince* the other, nor can

(M. M. M.)

Disputes Review'd.

can be us'd with any other Design but to make the contending Parties *hate one another*; And whose Kingdom that serves the Interests of, 'tis easy to say, not Christ's I am sure. Let us not judge of *Mens spiritual and Eternal State*, and send Men to Hell presently as Reprobates, because they are not in every thing of *our Mind*, or cannot fall in with *our Measures*. They that do so usurp a Divine Prerogative, take the *Keys of Hell and Death* out of the Hands of Christ, and shew themselves to be as destitute of the Fear of God, as they are of Love to their Neighbour.

5. Let us often think of *the Account* we must shortly *give* to our *Great Master* of all our *Disputes* with our Fellow-servants *by the Way*. Let us consider how our *Disputes* will look in that Day, and what our own *Reflections* will be then upon them.

Cor. 1. 20. When the Apostle asks, *Where is the Disputer of this World?* Perhaps (saith the Excellent Archbishop *Tillotson*) he intends to insinuate, "That the wrangling Work of Disputation hath place only in this World, and upon this Earth, where only there is a Dust to be rais'd; but will have no place in the other, where all things will be clear, and past Dispute: And (saith he) a good Man would be loth to be taken out of the World reeking hot from a sharp Contention with a perverse Adversary, and not a little out of countenance to find himself in this Temper translated into the calm and peaceable Regions of the Blessed, where nothing but perfect Charity and Good-Will reign for ever.

Phil. 4. 5.

Jam. 5. 9.

Mat. 24. 49.

Let our *Moderation* therefore *be known unto all Men*, Moderation in all *Disputes*, because *our Lord is at hand*, nor let us *grudge one against another*, because the *Judge standeth before the Door*; and we may tremble to think what our *Doom* will be, if we be found *smiting our Fellow-Servants*; and how we shall answer it, if it be prov'd upon

upon us, who have had so much forgiven us by our Master, that for a small matter we have *taken them by the Throat*. But seeing we look for a Day of Account, in which there will be a Review of Disputes, let us give Diligence, that we may be *2 Pet. 3. 14* *found of Christ in Peace*. When Job and his Friends had *maintain'd* a long Dispute, in which many hasty peevish Words were *exchang'd*, God at length *interpos'd* as Moderator, and gave Judgment upon the Debate, that they were all *to be blam'd*, and had taken a great deal of Pains (as most Disputants do) to *make work for Repentance*; and therefore the contending Parties must ask Pardon of God and one another, must forgive and forget, and live in love for the future. And this is the best *End of Controversies*, happy were it if they were all brought to this Issue now; for to this Issue all the Controversies that are among *Good Men* will be brought at last, when they shall meet in the World of everlasting Light and Love.

For the Fourth. Of all Disputes Christ will be sure to reckon with his Disciples for their Disputes about Precedency and Superiority; that was the Dispute here, *Who should be greatest*: And Christ doth not determine the Matter, as it might justly be expected he should have done, if he had intended that *Peter*, or any other of them, should have a Primacy and Supremacy above the rest; no, he is displeas'd with them for starting such a Question, and disputing about it, because it was an Indication that they *all* aim'd at being great in the World, and were *ambitious* of it, and whenever Preferments were to be had, they would *quarrel* among themselves, which should get *the best*; notwithstanding the *Meanness* of their *first Education*, when they were bred *Fishermen*, which might have done *something* to curb *aspiring Thoughts*; and the *Goodness* of their *late Education*,

tion, when they were train'd up to be *Apostles*, which might have done *much more*.

Now there are five Reasons why this Disposition of theirs was very displeasing to our Lord Jesus.

1. Because it came from a mistaken Notion of his Kingdom, which they had learn'd at the Feet of their Scribes, and had not yet unlearn'd, tho' they had sat so long at Christ's Feet, so hard is it to conquer the Power of Prejudice. The Jews mis-understanding many of the Prophecies of the Old Testament, which spake of the *Messiah* and his Kingdom, expected him to appear in *external Pomp and Splendor*, and to exercise a temporal Jurisdiction, to break the *Roman Yoke* from off their Necks, and give them Dominion over the neighbour Nations. The Disciples had suck'd in this Notion with their Milk, and did imagine (as should seem by many Instances) that our Lord Jesus, tho' he appear'd meanly *at first*, would in a little time bring it to *this*, and that this was the *Kingdom of Heaven*, which they were to preach as at hand : And this they had an eye to when they strove *who should be the greatest*.

Now this was a great Mistake ; and the constant Tenor and Tendency of Christ's Life and Doctrine might have convinc'd them that it was so ; that Christ's Kingdom was not to be of *this World*, but was intended to be all spiritual, the Laws and Powers of it, the Rewards and Punishments of it all spiritual, the Weapons of our Warfare *not carnal* ; that the *Messiah* was to rule by *his Spirit in the Spirits of Men* : The Design of it was to *refine* Men from the Dross and Dregs of Worldliness and Sensuality, and to *raise them up* to a holy, heavenly, spiritual and divine Life, and to teach them to *look down* upon all earthly things with a *gracious and generous Contempt* ; such as this was the Constitution and Complexion

John 18. 36.

xion of Christ's Kingdom, and therefore it could not but be displeasing to him, for them to dote on earthly Greatness.

2. Because it was directly contrary to the two great *Lessons* of his School, and *Laws* of his Kingdom, *Humility* and *Love*. It is against the Law of *Humility* to covet to be *great* in this World, and against the Law of *Love* to strive who shall be *greatest*. Had not Christ taught them both these Lessons, both by *Precept* and by *Example*? Had he not made it the first Condition of Discipleship, that *whosoever would come after him must deny themselves*? Mat. 16. 24. Doth not the great Law of *Love* oblige us *in Honour to prefer one another*, and to give place to our Brethren? What *unapt* Scholars then were they who had not learn'd such *plain* and *needful* *Lessons* as these! How well is it for us that we have a kind Master, who doth not expel out of his School dull Scholars, but gives them his *Spirit* to *open their Understandings*, and *bring things to their Remembrance*.

When we are *eager* in our Pursuits of the World, and *seek* and *aim* at *great* things in it; when we are *quarrelsome* with our Brethren, and carry'd out into Indelicacies by our *Contests* and *Passions*, let us think how *unbecoming* Christians this is, how contrary we walk to the Laws of that *Holy Religion* we make profession of: And can we *glory* in the Honour of it? can we with any confidence *plead* the Promises of it, or *please* our selves with the *Privileges* of it, or *feed* our selves with the *Hopes* of it, when we have so little regard to the *Precepts* of it? Will those be willing to lose their Lives for their Religion, that cannot deny themselves the Gratification of a foolish Lust or Passion for it?

3. Because it was *utterly disagreeable* to the *Example* which *Jesus Christ himself had set them*, and the *Copy* he had given them to write after. The *Word of Command* which he gave them

Luke 22. 27.
Mat. 20. 28.

Phil. 2. 5.

John 13.
1—15.

when he call'd them to be his Disciples, was, *Follow me; Do as you see me do: But when they were disputing who should be greatest, and each setting up a Title to worldly Pomp and Power, they were far from resembling him, who was among them as one that served, and came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.* The same Mind should have been in them, that was in him, who was so great an Example of Humility and Love, Condescension and Affection, who emptied himself, and made himself of no Reputation; who not only in the general Scheme of his Undertaking, but in the particular Passages of his Life, gave such Instances of Self-denial, as justly are the Wonder of Angels, who to teach them this Lesson, and oblige them to learn it with this very Argument, not long after this, wash'd their Feet, and bid them do as he had done; could the Followers of such a Master contend for Precedency, and not blush at the Reflection upon their own Folly and Unworthiness.

Let us *shame our selves* out of our Pride, and Passion, and Affectation of worldly Honour, and inordinate Pursuit of worldly Wealth, with this Consideration: Shall I set my Heart upon that which my Master was *dead to*, and *deny'd himself in*, and for *my sake* too? Am I not a Christian? a Follower of Christ? I must then either change my Name, or recover a better Temper. Ought I not to walk *in the same Spirit, in the same Steps?*

4. Because it would *render them very unfit for the Services which he had appointed them to.* It was very absurd for them to strive *who should be greatest*, who should live most *at ease*, and most *in state*, who should have the most Power and the largest Command, when they were all to *labour and suffer Reproach*, to live in Meanness and Poverty, to be loaded with Disgrace and Ignominy, and counted as the *Off-scouring of all things*; nay, to be kill'd all the Day long, and devoted to Death,

Tim. 4. 10.

as Sheep to the Slaughter, and rul'd with Rigour :
Such Dispositions and Expectations as these would
be but a bad Preparative for Sufferings. They
that would approve themselves good Soldiers of
Jesus Christ must *endure Hardness*, and not *affect* 2 Tim. 2. 3.
Greatness.

And therefore tho' this Indisposition, and the
Mistake it was grounded upon, seems by many
Instances after this to have continued as long as
they had Christ's bodily Presence with them ; yet
before they *launch'd out into the Deep* of their Ser-
vice, they were perfectly *cnr'd of it*, by the *pour-*
ing out of the Spirit, upon them, after which we
have them no more dreaming of a Temporal
Kingdom, nor striving *who should be greatest* ; for
those whom God designs to employ in any Ser-
vice for him, he will either *find them fit*, or *make*
them so : And *as the Day, so shall the Strength*, so
shall the Spirit *be*. And if we would be ready
for all the Will of God, and stand compleat in
it, so as not to be driven from our Work by the
Difficulties we may meet in it, we must be dead
to worldly Wealth and Grandeur, and *live a-*
bove them, as those that *look beyond them*.

5. Because it was a corrupt Temper that would
be more than any thing the Bane of the Church in
after-times ; would be the Reproach of its Mini-
stry, an *Obstruction* to its Enlargement, the *Distur-*
bance of its Peace, and the Original of all the
Breaches that would be made upon its *Order* and
Unity. Our Saviour foresaw this, and therefore
took all Occasions to *check and repress* it in his
Disciples, for *warning* to all others ; that all who
are called by his Name, and profess Relation to
him, may be *jealous over themselves with a godly*
Jealousy, and may *look diligently lest this Root of* Heb. 12. 15.
Bitterness spring up and trouble both themselves
and others, and thereby many be *defil'd and*
disturb'd.

3 John. 9.

2 Thes. 2. 4.

Ia. 32. 15.

When we see how early in the Primitive Times the *Mystery of Iniquity* began to work in Strifes among Ministers, who should be greatest, in *Diotrephes*, who lov'd to have the *Preheminence*, and in the *Man of Sin*, who, by Degrees, under the Influence of this Principle, came to usurp an Universal Headship, and to exalt himself above all that is called *God*, or that is worshipped. Let us see with what good Reason Christ so often caution'd his Disciples against this, and lament the Mischief that is done by it to the Church. It must needs be that *such Offences would come*; and we are told of them before, that we may not be stumbled at them, but *woe to those* by whom they do come. The Prevalency of such a Temper as this, as far as it appears, is very threatening. But when the *Spirit shall be poured out upon us from on high*, there shall be no more such Disputes as these, and then the *Wilderness shall become a fruitful Field*.

Upon the whole Matter, therefore, Let our Strife be who shall be *best*, not who shall be *greatest*.

1. Let us never strive who shall be greatest in this World, who shall have the best Preferment, who shall be Master of the best Estate, or make the best Figure, but acquiesce in the Lot Providence carves out to us, not aiming at great things, or striving for them.

Consider what worldly Greatness is :

(1) What a despicable thing it is to those that have their Eye upon another World. All that by Faith have seen the *Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ*, that are acquainted with the Grandeur of the upper and better World, and are conversant with that World, have laid up their Treasure in it, and set their Hearts upon it, and hope shortly to share in the Enjoyments of it, what a poor thing are the Pomp and Pleasures of this World to them ! how easily can they write

Vanity

Vanity upon them! for they know better Things: What's Purple, and Scarlet, and fine Linnen, and faring sumptuously every Day, to one that's cloth'd with the Robes of Righteousness and Garments of Salvation, and has a continual Feast upon the Promises of the New Covenant? What are Titles of Honour, or splendid Attendance, to one that is call'd a Friend of God, and, about whom the Holy Angels encamp? What are the fading withering Glories of Time, in comparison with the far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory that is to be reveal'd. Let us be ashain'd then to strive, or seem to strive, for that which, if we act as becomes our Character, we cannot but look upon with a holy Contempt and Indifferency.

(2) What a dangerous thing this worldly Greatness is to those that have not their Eyes upon another World, how apt it is to draw their Hearts away from God, and from the Consideration and Pursuit of a future Blessedness, and to fix them to this World, and make them willing to take up with a Portion in it; And especially what a strong Temptation it is to break through all the sacred Fences of the Divine Law to compass it. The Devil would not have tempted Christ to worship him, with a Promise of all the Kingdoms of the World, and the Glory of them, but that he had caught many a one with that Bait. As they that will be rich, 1 Tim. 6.9. so they that will be great, and cannot think themselves happy, unless they be, fall into Temptation, and a Snare, and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts. Let us therefore never court our own Trouble, nor covet to enter into Temptation, as they do, who, when they are as great as God saw fit to make 'em, yet are still aiming to be greater, and striving to be greatest.

2. Let all our Strife be who shall be best, not disputing who has been best, that's a vain-glorious Strife, but humbly contending who shall be so; *who*

Disputes Review'd.

who shall be most humble, and stoop lowest, for the Good of others, and who shall labour most for the Common Welfare. This is a gracious Strife ; a Strife that will pass well in our Account, when all our Disputes will be review'd. If we

1 Cor. 12. ult. will *covet*, let us *covet earnestly the best Gifts*, covet to be rich in Faith, and rich in good Works : If

2 Cor. 5. 9. we will be *ambitious*, let it be the Top of our Ambition to do good, and therein to be accepted of the Lord. If we will *aim to excel*, let it be in that which is virtuous and praise-worthy, and in a holy Zeal for the Honour of God, and the Advancement of the true Interests of Christ's Kingdom.

Heb. 10. 24. Herein let us strive to *excel others*, and to do more good *than they do*, not that we may have the Praise of it, but that God may have the Glory of it, and that we may provoke others to *Love* and *to good Works*; not that we may be *many Masters*, but that we may make our selves *Servants of all*. Let us *go before* in Zeal, and yet be willing to *come behind* in Humility and Self-denial ; do better than others, and yet, in Love and Lowliness of Mind, *esteem others better than our selves*.

Phil. 2. 3. But especially let us strive to *excel our selves*, and to do more good *than we have done*. Let it be a constant *Dispute* with our own Souls, why we do not lay out our selves more for God. And when we remember the *Kindness of our Youth*, and the *Love of our Espousals*, instead of leaving that *first Love*, and cooling in it, let our *advanced Years* contend earnestly to *excel our early ones*, that our *last Days* may be our *best Days*, and our *last*

Phil. 3. 13, 14. *Works* our *best Works*. *Forgetting the Things which are behind*, let us still press forward towards Perfection, press forward towards the *Mark*, for the *Prize of the High Calling*, that at length we may have not only an Entrance, but an abundant *Entrance ministered to us into the Everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.

2 Pet. 1. 11.

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